President:
Dorothy Walker
283-3303

Lafayette Historical Society

POST OFFICE BOX 133, LAFAYETTE, CA 94549

NEWS

Lafayette, California | April 2008 | Vol. 35, No. 1

Mark Your Calendar!

Annual LHS Potluck Dinner

DATE: **Wednesday, MAY 13, 2008**

PLACE: Temple Isaiah, ***3800 Mt. Diablo Blvd. at Risa Road up the hill from the Veteran's Building***
(See map on last page)

TIME: ***6 p.m.*** **Social Hour**
7 p.m. **Dinner**
8 p.m. **Short business meeting followed by**

DISCUSSION: **Robert Hirst**, *Editor of Mark Twain papers, U.C. Bancroft Library*
Topic: ***Mark Twain's time in California and how his papers got to the Bancroft archives***

PRICE: $10.00 per person to help defray LHS costs PLUS
Your favorite hearty salad or casserole *(please bring serving utensils)*
Please observe Jewish dietary restrictions – No pork, shellfish or dairy products
Dessert and coffee provided by Board Members.

QUESTIONS: Call Ollie Hamlin - 283-6822 or Mary Solon - 283-7335

President's Message

Its spring again and time for our annual potluck. This year we are trying a new venue – Temple Isaiah, just up the hill from the Veteran's Building. It is a great space with lots of parking. (Go to the westerly end of the parking lot for the entrance to the dining hall). There are some dietary restrictions that they have asked us to observe - no pork, shellfish or dairy products. Please respect their rules.The Board made the decision to change where we hold our Potluck due to increasing rental costs and insurance requirements by the Veterans.

Our speaker is an eminent scholar on Mark Twain. Robert Hirst is the chief editor of the Mark Twain papers at the Bancroft Library, U.C. Berkeley. He, like his subject matter, is known for his humor and light-hearted delivery of topics of interest to all. He will tell many Twain stories and how the papers of this great American humorist end up in California.

The Historical Society is involved in a number of other activities. On May 3rd, LHS and Lafayette Library and Learning Center will kick-off the campaign to create an endowment to allow for increased hours at the Library. All Consortium members and groups that will be part of the Library will have displays and informational tables at Stanley Middle School on School St. all day, 9 to 4. Please come by and say hello. We will also be participating at the April 22nd Lafayette Seniors Liaison Committee event to introduce all of the organizations and senior resources available to the people of Lafayette.This event will be held at the Our Saviors Lutheran Church on Carol Lane. Additional information can be found in the flyer we've inserted in this Newsletter.

I want to thank Supervisor Gayle Uilkema for donating a number of newspaper articles on the City's incorporation. We have also heard from Alice Breckling writing on her early memories of Lafayette in the 60's.

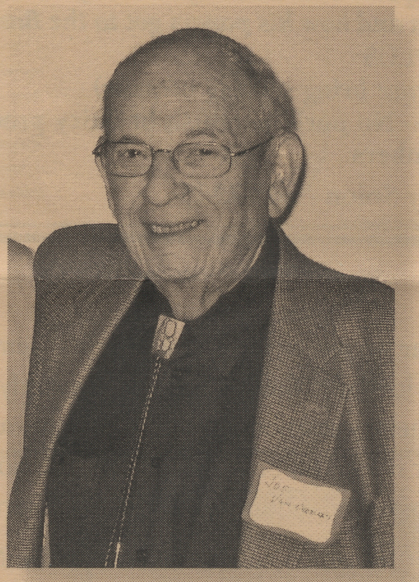
I would like to remind you that LHS would like to copy your family photos of life in Lafayette. Mary Solon has a portable scanner to scan the photos in order to expand our archives documenting how our town has grown and changed. Please give Mary a call.

Looking forward to seeing many of you on May 13. ***—Dorothy Walker, President of the Board***

Annual Membership Dues Due

Its that time of year. We would appreciate your continued membership in the Lafayette Historical Society. Membership dues are still only ten dollars a year. The dues finance the Newsletter and costs of running our organization. An envelop has been included in this Newsletter to facilitate the return of your check to us.

Jop Van Overveen



It is with great sadness that the Board of the Lafayette Historical Society mourns the passing of Jop Van Overveen, long time Lafayette civic activist and LHS Board Member on March 3, 2008 at the age of 91.

Jop was born in Holland and after a short sojourn in South Africa immigrated to the United States. He served in the US Army in World War II and became a naturalized citizen in 1940. He met his beloved wife Irene about this time and they were married in 1943. Jop was discharged as a 1st Lieutenant in 1946 and Jop and Irene moved to Northern California in 1949 and Lafayette in 1950 where they lived for 57 years.

Jop belonged to many civic and professional groups. He was instrumental in the incorporation of the City of Lafayette and regularly attended City Council meetings where he was known for his "lectern moments". He loved his city and his country. He was active in many local organizations and our board is most grateful for his longtime involvement in the Lafayette Historical Society. He attended Board meetings regularly until his death.

We will remember him for his caring spirit, his wonderful sense of humor, and his passion for civic advocacy. He will be missed by many but never forgotten.

—Mary McCosker

Plane Crash at Lafayette Reservoir

On Saturday, January 3, 1953, two men in a small airplane crashed into the Lafayette Reservoir. Neither survived. This is their story.

Thomas A. Pritchard Jr., age 27, was a commercial student at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. The son of a prominent restaurant owner from Manila, Philippines, he lived with his mother in Berkeley. Pritchard owned the Culver V airplane that crashed. William Harrison, age 25, was a postman from Oakland. He was a passenger and it was the first time he had flown.

The Culver V aircraft was built after WWII. There were many military pilots returning from the war and it was felt there would be a market for private planes. Culver had limited success with their small plywood planes.

Pritchard and Harrison took off from Hayward Airport at 4 p.m. and were seen at Buchanan Field in Concord at about 5 p.m. on Saturday. (Some reports had them at Salinas earlier in the day.) The men told Buchanan airport workers that they were planning to fly back to Hayward. Nothing was heard from them afterwards.

Continued on Page 3

Photo from the Contra Costa County Historical Society

Because Mr. Pritchard was to attend a party Saturday night, his mother did not report him missing until the following day, Sunday, January 4.The Civil Aeronautics Administration, precursor to the National Safety Transportation Board, was notified. Pritchard's car was found at the Hayward airport where the flight originated.Ten planes from the 41st Air Rescue Squadron at Hamilton Air Force Base and the Civil Air Patrol were enlisted in the search. Conditions were foggy and they did not find the plane.

Lieutenant Commander Edward Givens of Lafayette, his son and a friend had seen the "low wing monoplane gliding toward the reservoir at 5:15 p.m. after the engine sputtered and quit." After reading a newspaper account, Givens notified the sheriff who contacted the Hayward Airport. On Monday two men from Hayward drove to the reservoir, searched a canyon and then found pieces of the fuselage, pieces of the propeller and the jacket and wallet of Mr. Harrison at the dam. It was assumed the plane crashed in the reservoir.

By Tuesday, January 6, dragging operations were underway by the sheriff's office, the coroner and the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD), owner of the reservoir. At the time the Lafayette Reservoir did not have the existing ranger station, nor was it open for walking and hiking. EBMUD workmen snagged a heavy object in 25 feet of water. The Navy was called in and they brought divers. Also that same day a 30 foot tree was found at or near the reservoir with the top clipped off.

By Wednesday, divers realized the heavy object was not the airplane but a 30 foot section of steel pipe. Dragging operations continued. Fifty men now helped in the recovery, from the sheriff's department, EBMUD, the Lafayette Fire Department, and military personnel from Fort Scott Army base and Hunters Point. Eight boats and an Air Force helicopter were added to the recovery effort. Horseback riders were brought in to search the nearby brush. The 70 acre water surface was plotted and then dragged on a systematic basis. Still no luck. The weather some days was cold, foggy, rainy and windy.

Divers did not have aqua lungs for this mission. Here is a quote from a newspaper account at the time. "Working with 1600 feet of air hose extending from a compressor unit mounted on a truck at the crest of the dam, the five-man diving team from Hunters Point Naval dry dock rotated an hour at a time in their underwater search, but found no trace of the plane and its occupants." An Army "duck" (DUKW), an amphibious vehicle, was brought in to help the divers. The versatile duck was a WWII vehicle for transporting troops and supplies over land and water. It was used as long ago as D-Day and as recently as Hurricane Katrina. On land it could do 55 mph but in water only 6 knots. It had an adjustable tire pressure system for hard pavement or sand. For this rescue effort it had a motor and air compressor unit mounted so the search could be conducted farther from the shore. Every day the search continued.

Late Friday the airplane was snagged, oil and plywood surfaced on the spot. Too late to rig up a tow, a marker was placed on the spot. To the consternation of the searchers, the marker drifted away overnight and the search began again the next

Continued on Page 4

day, Saturday, January 10, at the approximate spot. Fortunately, the plane was again found and finally pulled out of the water 600. feet from the shore, a week after the crash. The cockpit was empty. The ignition switch was in the "on" position. The plane had little damage. The propeller was broken and there was damage to the left wing. The seat belts were unfastened and intact. The landing gear was not deployed, normal for a water landing. It appeared the occupants survived the crash landing and emerged from the cockpit. Both were reported to be good swimmers.

Not until the following day was the body of passenger William Harrison found, 60-75 feet off shore. He had removed some of his clothing and shoes, helping him to swim. According to a subsequent coroner's report, he died of "asphyxiation by drowning".

According to newspaper reports, the search for Mr. Pritchard continued until at least Thursday, January 15. His body was never found.

Had the accident happened this year on January 3, walkers and rangers would have witnessed the crash from the dam as the reservoir wouldn't have closed for another 15 minutes. Perhaps one or both victims could have been rescued. The reservoir, fatal to the two flyers in 1953, is now a respite for walkers, joggers, hikers, summer day-campers and fishermen.

All photos used with permission from the Contra Costa County Historical Society in Martinez. The source for this article is newspaper accounts from the Oakland Tribune, the Walnut Creek Sun, the Contra Costa Gazette and the Contra Costa Times.

—Mary Solon

A Knoll for Remembrance

Excerpted from an article by Dorothy Mutnick (1978)

The Lafayette cemetery is located just west of the Pleasant Hill Road interchange and is the larger of the two cemeteries of the public Alamo-Lafayette Cemetery District, both of which have had continuing use since the 1850's.

In 1854 Henrietta Hodges, daughter of David and Louisa Hodges, died when she was 13 years, 7 months old. A proper place for burial had to be found. A corner of the Hodges' claim lay south of the road to the redwoods. There across the road near her family yet out of the path of their activities a pleasing grassy knoll with good drainage and a vista of lovely valleys and hillsides was selected. Hers is the first burial in either the Lafayette or Alamo cemetery which can be shown by the headstone and cemetery record.

The grassy knoll and the expanse in front were naturally set apart by the roads which also made access convenient. That it became known by 1856 as the graveyard indicates that others lie there too. After Lafayette was selected for the name of the post office established in 1857 it could be called the Lafayette Cemetery. Two infants are known burials in 1858, one a Hunsaker from across the road east, the other a Renwick from over a mile to the south.

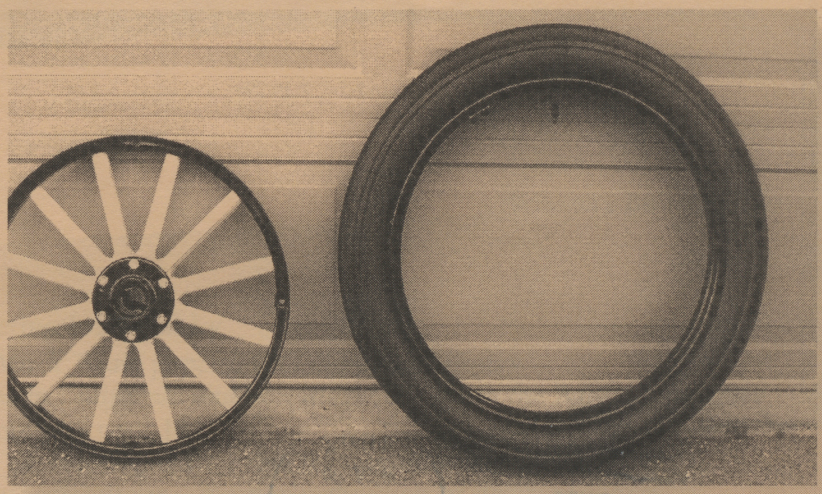
On October 19, 1874, Medford Gorham sold 4 ½ acres of his land to the Directors of the Lafayette Cemetery Association for $100 in gold coin. The cemetery has remained essentially the same shape and size except for a portion sold to the State in 1937.

Friends and relatives of the community planted trees and generally cared for the cemetery especially their family plots. In 1937 the Board of Supervisors established the Alamo-Lafayette Cemetery District when more than 58% of the registered voters of the elementary school districts of Lafayette, Walnut Creek, Alamo and Danville petitioned them to set up a public cemetery district to tax itself for the care and upkeep of the Lafayette and Alamo cemeteries. The law established a maximum rate of 2 ½ cents per $100 assessed valuation. Since 1937 purchase of plots for burial of certain relatives and themselves has been restricted to residents and taxpayers of the district.

—Mary McCosker

MORE ABOUT THE WHEELS – REVISITED

In preparing this newsletter article I looked back at previous articles and found the following introduction to the article for the April, 2007 NEWSLETTER— "There is more to rebuilding the wheels for OLD BETSY than might seem to appear. As I have said before, a Model T Truck has tires on a rim, a rim on the wheel, wooden spokes that connect the rim to a hub, and the hub holds the spokes all together to fit onto the axle – either front or rear. The rear axle wheels have a brake drum attached to the hub".



As of today, all wheels have new spokes, all tires are mounted on rims, the rims and wheel hubs have been sand-blasted and powder-coated with new black paint and all parts are ready to reassemble on OLD BETSY. Everything looks fine and like new. The next jobs are to reinstall the new WARFORD TRANSMISSION and drive shaft then put the rims with tires onto the wheels and put OLD BETSY back into operation with four wheels on the ground.

The process of getting the old wheel parts off of OLD BETSY, separated into parts and reassembled has been time consuming. Just taking the old tires off of the old rims was more than we could handle, so BIG 0 was brought into the job. Getting the hubs sand-blasted and powder-coated involved West Coast Specialty Coatings of Concord. The new spokes were made and installed in Sonora by Vintage Wheel Shop. The remounting of the tires on the rims was done at Alhambra Garage in Martinez. We do have Model T repair manuals, but doing the above jobs requires some skills and tools that are needed and are better done by someone with current experience.

The picture shows a front wheel with the new spokes and a front tire mounted on a rim. The rear wheels, tires and rim are larger and are ready for installation.

—George Wasson

2008 Directors

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Recording Secretary: Mary McCosker 284-5376
Corresponding Secretary: Oliver Hamlin 283-6822
Artifact Documentation: Keith Blakeney 284-2221
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George Wasson 284-4603
Tom Titmus 299-2030
Nancy Flood 283-3409
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Walking Tours: Mary McCosker 284-5376
Fire Engine: George Wasson 284-4603
Potluck Dinner: Oliver Hamlin 283-6822
Membership: Oliver Hamlin 283-6822
Newsletter: Dorothy Walker, Charlotte Robertson

Return Service Requested

Lafayette Historical Society
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www.LafayetteHistory.org

Directions to the **Annual LHS Potluck Dinner** on *Wednesday*, **May 13, 2008**